

**Parking Subcommittee
Concept Paper – DRAFT
November 17, 2005**

Background

In an auto dominated region knit together by freeways and major thoroughfares, there are few convenient opportunities for people to go from place to place by walking or by public transportation. Since the auto is the dominant means of choice (whether by default or not), at each destination point in a trip, there must be a place to park—on street or off-street, on grade or in a garage.

Minimum off street parking requirements for single-family development were set out in Chapter 42 – two spaces for each dwelling unit- in 1982. It was not until 1989 that the city established specific off-street parking requirements in Chapter 26 for a wide range of other uses. Since that time a few changes have been made in city requirements though they have been relatively minor.

Provisions in the ordinance allow for variances from the parking requirements. Over the past 16 years, billions of dollars in new development have been spent in Houston but only a handful of parking variances have been requested. Is that because the ordinance requirements are near perfect or is it that the market requirements exceed city minimums so there is no issue? If response is solely to the market, is there a hidden and long-term public cost that the taxpayer may not want to pay or should not pay? There is an obvious relationship between parking, economic development, and mobility. Too much economic development with too much parking can overtax the capacity of a street system, producing gridlock and potential economic stagnation.

In recent years, changing development patterns, most notably towards higher density development, have caused a number of parking related issues to surface. Very high density employment centers such as the Texas Medical Center where increased parking capacity will overburden the roads that feed into and through the TMC is one such issue. Another is the possibility that current parking requirements may prohibit the transit oriented development being promoted along Main Street. Lack of adequate parking in neighborhoods both resident and guest parking is another serious issue that many Houstonians grapple with daily.

In the Spring of 2005, the Planning Commission was charged with examining some of these pertinent issues and developing recommendations for future action. Following are the Parking Subcommittee's findings and recommendations.

Recommendations

Texas Medical Center

Continued growth in the Medical Center area and reliance on structured parking facilities is highlighting the issue of inadequate roadway capacity. At what point do roads become impassible due to high volumes of travelers? While the TMC has been able to address such issues internally, a growing presence of private institutions not affiliated with the TMC poses new challenges. Current state law does not allow the combining of

private funding with healthcare tax dollars for structure parking, people movers, and other potential solutions.

The Committee recommends that Planning Commission take the following actions:

- Expand the Parking Management Area to include new properties.
- Establish a ceiling on parking for congested areas- in particular, the area north of the Bayou.
- Require traffic studies for proposed developments locating in congested areas.
- Encourage partnerships with City, County Metro to build remote structured parking facilities along the rail line.

Decal Parking Program

The City's Decal Parking Program has been successful in relieving overflow parking problems in a number of Houston's urban neighborhoods. With some minor improvements, this program will better meet the needs of residential communities and the commercial establishments located within them.

- Notification of Decal Parking application should be mailed to both owners and tenants of properties
- Special Events Permits. One day, special event permits should be given to residents upon request. Special events include weddings, receptions, funeral, parties. Request forms would be available on line and could be faxed to Parking Management staff for review and processing. Temporary, one-day passes with specific times would be issued.
- Contractor/Builder Permits. These would be provided free of charge by the week or month to contractors building or remodeling homes on blocks that have Decal Parking.

See attached matrix

Guest Parking

As density increases in both urban and suburban neighborhoods, parking for guests is becoming scarce. This condition is often exacerbated when infrastructure in older neighborhoods is not adequate such as the existence of narrow paving sections and open ditch drainage. Multiple driveways also add to the problem. Chapter 42 does not require guest parking and rising land prices are prohibitive. On the other side of the coin, those developers who have provided guest parking say that these spots often go unused, or are used long term by homeowners who, for a variety of reasons, choose not to park in their own drives.

While the Committee did not agree on the severity of the problem the following action is recommended:

Establish incentives that will encourage developers to provide guest parking for their projects. Possibilities include

- Set back reductions
- 16' driveway where 28' is required to allow for parallel parking
- Alley's to allow homes to front on public street with garage access from behind. This eliminates driveway cuts and allows more on-street parking.

City services would be allowed in alley (**this may not belong on the list since the rules already include it.)

- Combining detention, compensating open space, mixed use

Parking on Commercial/Transit Corridors

Recently, retail and mixed use projects proposed in the Main Street corridor have requested reduced parking based on the proximity to light rail stations. These urban, pedestrian oriented projects are being encouraged by a number of entities and they conform to the City and County sponsored Main Street Corridor Master Plan. However, little data, if any, is available to substantiate arguments in favor of granting variances in for reduced parking. Concerns expressed by neighboring property owners and others in high density commercial areas include the unintended consequences of granting such variances incrementally, overflow parking that spills onto adjacent properties and the possibility of establishing a retail environment that is certain to fail. The Committee believes that without more empirical data, recommendations for reduced parking ratios on transit lines cannot be made.

The City of Dallas recently initiated a comprehensive parking study with a special emphasis on high capacity transit corridors that will examine parking ratios, peak use times, mixed use concepts, vacant land and joint development of parking structures. In addition to examining data from other cities, Planning Commission should watch closely the outcomes of the Dallas study and consider any aspects of the findings that may be relevant to Houston.

In addition, the Committee recommends that Planning Commission further study two concepts:

- Parking grids based on need. Some areas may have a ceiling and some areas may have alternative parking ratios.
- Public/private partnerships to develop parking structures